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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4037
INFO RUCNAFG/AFGHANISTAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KABUL 005435

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/25/2016

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SUBJECT: PRT KHOST: NEW ABP COMMANDER OPTIMISTIC DESPITE
DECIMATED/DEMORALIZED FORCE

REF: KABUL 3822

Classified By: Political Counselor Sara Rosenberry for reasons 1.4 (B)
and (D).

11. (C) Summary: Despite inheriting a demoralized force on the heels of a 200- to 250-man walkout (a fifth of the force), incoming acting Afghan Border Police (ABP) Commander Kasim Khil is optimistic he can bring back and improve troop strength and effectiveness. In what appears to be a model approach, in his first week, Khil visited checkpoints and ensured they were manned (using locals), met with local elders, and identified and advanced solutions to security and morale concerns. Although Khil said it is still unclear who the permanent ABP Commander will be, he speculated it will not/not be the old commander or deputy commander, whose acrimonious relationship was a factor in the ABP walkout. End Summary.

New Commander Surprisingly Optimistic

12. (C) Kasim Khil does not act like a commander that is trying to lure back a fifth of his workforce. Khost,s new acting Afghan Border Police (ABP) Chief was affable, light-hearted, and optimistic when PolOff met him November 4. The 50-year-old Khil brings 27 years of border policing experience with him. During the early 80s, he was chief of Khost,s border police. Since then he has served previous incarnations of the ABP in a variety of border provinces. His previous job was head of the ABP's Quick Reaction Force (QRF) in Kabul.

13. (C) Khil arrived in Khost October 23 to take over a decimated and dispirited ABP force. About 250 of the 1,300-man force abandoned their posts the last two weeks of October prior to the Islamic holiday of EID. When Khil arrived at Khost ABP Headquarters, about 20 officers were on hand and he had to personally conduct night patrol his first night in town. Khil said about 169 of those troops have

returned following the end of the holiday. Khil was optimistic the force could be reconstituted in the coming weeks, particularly following recent authorization from Kabul he claimed will increase the force to 1,600 and rumors it will increase again to 2,000 in the near future.

ABP Family Feud and Leadership Issues

14. (C) According to Khil, DynCorp police mentors, and Governor Arsala Jamal, lack of effective leadership and the highly tense standoff between former ABP Commander General Muhammad Khalil Amin Zada and former ABP Deputy Commander Colonel Almar Gul Mangal was a factor in the walkout (ref). Following his bleak assessment of ABP needs and manpower, Governor Arsala Jamal complained that the old leadership ignored ABP problems and just told me things were great.⁸

15. (C) Khalil had complained bitterly to the PRT that Gul was undermining his authority and trying to have Khalil killed for meddling in his smuggling operations. After Gul was summoned to Kabul for an investigation in early October, he encouraged his ABP supporters and fellow Mangal tribesmen to abandon their posts to show ABP leadership his strength. Gul initiated similar muscle flexing in July in an attempt to make Khalil look inept. ABP and DynCorp officials estimate the Mangal mafia⁸ element of Khost's ABP force to be about 25 percent. Khil said despite Gul's best efforts, he will not be coming back to Khost and will, at a minimum, get reassigned because he has problems with Americans.⁸ He added that loyalty to Gul was only a contributing factor in the walkout for some of the troops and will be a nonfactor in whether troops return since the Khalil versus Gul dynamic no

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longer exists.

16. (C) According to DynCorp mentors, Khalil was increasingly negatively perceived by the rank and file as a commander who spends too much time in Kabul. Instead of rallying his troops following an October 15 attack on BCP 7 that resulted in four ABP deaths, General Khalil immediately left for Kabul. Khil said Khalil told him he is in Kabul for health problems, but suggested Khalil is more depressed and afraid of Gul than physically ill after visiting him. Khil said there was about a 40 percent chance Khalil will return to Khost if Gul is transferred or fired. Khil said he was the top contender for the permanent job now, but that the situation was far from settled.

Priority 1: Manning Checkpoints; Rallying Locals

17. (C) Khil has made his first priority to show an ABP presence in the districts and his second to address the concerns that prompted the massive walkout. He immediately called down about 100 of his QRF troops and Afghanistan's Deputy Commander of ABP from Kabul to conduct a sweeping tour of the province's border areas October 25 and 26. Khil said the purpose of the 10-truck convoy was to show ABP presence to the population to counter enemy propaganda that Afghan forces were retreating to Khost City. The trip was also an opportunity for his crack troops⁸ from Kabul to show their provincial colleagues how to conduct searches and patrols and to visit the families of fallen ABP.

18. (C) During the tour Khil talked to elders throughout the province and persuaded Kuchi tribesman to man the Babrak Tana checkpoint in Tere Zayi (Border Check Point 7) and locals to man the Lesur checkpoint in Gurbuz (BCP 4). The walkout hit BCP 7 and 4 the hardest, where ABP strength plummeted from 35 to two and from 25 to 0, respectively, during EID. In the next couple of weeks Khil hopes to return to near-normal ABP complements at both checkpoints.

Grass Roots Offensive Targets Hearts and Minds

¶9. (C) His grass-roots strategy is to recreate the close ABP-local cooperation that exists in Jaji Maidan District province-wide, where he claimed locals rally to protect the border checkpoint when attacked. He emphasized that without the support of locals, including tribal cousins on the Pakistani side of the border, the ABP would die &like a fish out of water.⁸ As a local from Jai Maidan, Khil claimed he is uniquely qualified to deal with locals and planned to use tribal leaders to help bring back deserting ABP and recruit new ABP. According to Khil, he has received about 150 calls from tribal elders eager to work with him (our conversation was interrupted by two such calls). He conceded cutting down on corruption would be key to rallying public support, a difficult task, but said leading by example would be a good place to start) in contrast to corrupt Deputy Col. Gul.

¶10. (C) Khil maintained that BCP 7 had not been attacked since the Kuchis moved in the last week of October, tacit proof of their connections to anti-GOA elements. The Kuchis need special attention, according to Khil, because they have received nothing⁸ from the GOA, making them ripe for cooperation with ACM. He suggested building a school or a well as a goodwill gesture for Kuchis in Tere Zayi and has already organized volunteer ABP officers to teach.

Priority 2: Address Morale Issues

¶11. (C) Khil said unless the problems leading to the walkout are addressed, &we can,t force the police to come back.⁸

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Those problems, in order of importance, according to Khil:

--Treatment: In the last two months about 10 ABP have been killed and 52 wounded. According to Khil there, has been no support for the injured or families, devastating ABP morale. Although ABP has a medical budget, ~ one tablet⁸ is accounted for as supplies disappear on the way from Kabul. He also complained that Khost Hospital staff required payment to wash bodies of fallen ABP.

--Security: Khil asked for resources such as barriers, concertina wire, and lighting to improve &insecure⁸ checkpoint security at the November 4 Provincial Security Meeting. He also asked for body armor and helmets, which the maneuver commander said he was working on. Khil said 30 ABP a month would be rotated from Khost to ABP regional command in Gardez for training from Blackwater. He claimed similar training improved his troops' performance in Kabul exponentially.

--Leadership (see above)

--Pay: Governor Jamal provided a 1,000 Afghani bonus to Afghan National Police (ANP) for the EID holiday, but nothing for the ABP. ABP has not been paid for two months because ABP leadership was afraid troops would leave anyway and take their last paychecks with them. Khil sent a finance officer from Kabul to pay soldiers at checkpoints and assure them pay would be more consistent in the future.

--Corruption. Everything from shoes to beds to ammunition is pilfered.

¶12. (C) COMMENT: Although still very early in his tenure, Khil appears to be everything the last two commanders were not: understanding of Khost,s tribal and Kuchi issues, enthusiastic, ethical, hard-working, and genuinely concerned about his troops. Starting fresh with new leadership is a positive step. Bringing either Khalil or Gul back would allow divisions in the ABP to fester. Embassy will make it clear to the government that we would oppose old, failed leaders being recycled after appeals with cash are made in

Kabul. This occurred earlier this year when Gul was able to buy his way back into the deputy position after being fired as the commander. Embassy and CSTC-A will continue to engage with GOA officials to ensure the right solution. End Comment.

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